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## Self-build in the UK and Netherlands

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### Self-build in the UK and Netherlands: mainstreaming self-development to address housing shortages?

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## Self-build in the UK and Netherlands: mainstreaming self-development to address housing shortages?

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This paper examines approaches to self or custom-build in the Netherlands and the UK to offer comparative insights into self- and custom-built housing contexts and cultures, and specifically, the relationships with local and strategic planning arrangements. The paper reviews arguments for self-build as a means to address housing shortages and examines the evidence of completions in practice. It positions the discussion in light of arguments that self-build can become a mainstream source of housing provision. The paper critically considers the role of think tanks in advocating housing policy solutions. Adopting a social constructionist perspective, the paper examines the work of the National Self-Build Association which has devised and implemented an action plan to promote the growth of self-build housing in the UK. Almere, which is located east of Amsterdam, is one of the case studies explored to inform thinking around self-build in the devolved UK. The conclusions tease out some of the implications for democratic and technocratic arguments around self-development and the right to design and build one's home.

**Keywords:** land use planning; self-build; policy; think tanks; UK; the Netherlands

### Introduction

This paper seeks to examine the portrayal of self-build housing and the ways in which a deliberate turn to self-build is being promulgated in the devolved UK. In Scotland, for example, the Scottish Government (2011) is keen to encourage greater use of self-build to help increase housing supply by developing a package of advice for potential self-builders. It specifically points to the potential contribution of self-build meeting need in the more remote parts of rural Scotland. It asserts that

Over the coming decade, we expect growth in this sector, as has happened in many European countries, with people taking advantage of new technologies which make self-build more accessible. We will establish a self-build initiative for Scotland, by developing a package of advice and support for those considering this option. We will also continue to engage with lenders to ensure there are self-build mortgage products available to credit-worthy borrowers, and we have already pressed the UK Government to ensure that any changes in the regulation of the mortgage market do not result in excessive barriers being put in the way of those who wish to build their own home. (Scottish Government, 2011, p. 12)

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The turn to self-build is an evident expression of changing ideas, attitudes and practices in housing and planning across the UK as a whole. This paper examines approaches to self- and custom-build in the Netherlands and the UK to offer comparative insights into self- and custom-built housing contexts and cultures, and specifically, the working relationships with local and strategic planning arrangements.

### Changing contexts

In the UK, a coalition government comprised of the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democratic Party was elected to office in 2010. Notwithstanding the differences in its constituent values, its dominant political philosophy is principally based on neoliberal economics. This ideological position had been anticipated by academic commentators prior to the election – research, for example, by Crisp, Macmillan, Robinson, and Wells (2009) suggested a shift in British politics away from traditional left–right divisions towards a more explicit neoliberal economic orthodoxy. There have been significant consequences for state–market–civil relations in general and for land use planning in particular. In essence, the neoliberal agenda posits a generic critique of state intervention, advocates a business or market solution to issues, and has extended into aspects of life that have been traditionally governed by non-market arrangements (Marquand, 2014; Sandel, 2012). Neoliberalism asserts a case for minimalist government, a reliance on business outcomes and a distaste of (conventional) regulatory intervention. There are a number of implications of this ideological positioning for all facets of government, governance and public policy, and specifically for land use planning and housing policies and practices.

Advocacy of self-build housing is a case in point. Morton (2013), for example, argues that self-build housing has considerable potential for new housing supply at a time when housing provision in the UK is a key political issue. He argues that, in the UK, self-build represents just 10% of new homes and that this is even less in England, where the housing crisis is at its most acute (Morton, 2013). Reflecting a broad neoliberal position, Morton (2013) asserts that the planning system is to blame as it restricts land release, leading to capture by large development interests, and destabilising housing and land markets. Moreover, Morton (2013) contends that self-build plays a much more important role in other countries.

The type of rhetoric such thinking produces may then be illustrated by the Foreword to a new self-build Action Plan to promote the growth of self-build housing in England (Self Build Government-Industry Working Group, 2011, p. 3), which aims to support “a self build revolution” and in which the minister pledges: “Any unnecessary regulation should be ripped up”. The circumstances of the UK housing market also set the context for this paper. This paper reviews some of the newer neoliberal-infused ideas being articulated by the think tank community – and explores some of their implications for established planning practices if adopted by government. This discussion is informed by social constructionist thinking. The work of the National Self Build Association (NASBA) in the UK in particular then provides a lens with which to critically consider the representation of the importance of “self-build” in meeting housing needs. Evidence from the Netherlands where self-build is relatively more advanced is then examined. A concluding section addresses this attempt to mainstream self-build (self-development) activity in the devolved UK as one response to a perceived housing crisis.

### Understanding the social reconstruction of self-build in solving the housing crisis

A social constructionist perspective towards knowledge focuses attention on how understanding and significance are given to social phenomena and how meaning is socially interpreted, negotiated and propagated through, for example, different modes of communication, discourses and institutional relations. Following Burr (1995), a social constructionist position situates knowledge as dynamic and sensitive to particular socio-political and cultural contexts; perceives knowledge as formed, reformed and sustained by social processes; and asserts that particular interpretations of knowledge determine specific actions. Adopting a social constructionist perspective requires assuming a critical stance to taken-for-granted knowledge. This stance is then useful in explaining attempts to rearticulate social phenomena, such as land use planning or housing policy in market contexts. It can also be used to explain the work of claims makers in advancing new concepts and practices.

Here, Hannigan's (2006) work in relation to the social construction of environmental problems, such as flooding, for example, provides a practical approach to understanding how particular issues come to the fore and how these are claimed and advanced. Specifically, he identifies a number of prerequisites which must be met if a new issue is to be framed as socially important. These prerequisites may be summarised as comprising (i) the availability of scientific evidence; (ii) the need for an institutional sponsor; (iii) the provision of economic incentives; (iv) the existence of popularisers to raise public awareness; and (v) drama and media attention to keep the issue in the public mind. The role of think tanks may be viewed as a critical component in these societal processes of representing issues in new ways and garnering support for the promulgation of alternative practices and political actions.

At times of contested economic pressure and uncertainty, debates about the efficiency and effectiveness of various government actions, interventions and policies become ever more heated. In recent times, think tanks – or “think and do” tanks – have emerged as potent forces in seeking to frame public debate. There is a large number of such bodies promoting different political perspectives on a swathe of social, economic, political and environmental matters (Rich, 2004). What think tanks do is essentially “think the unthinkable” (Cockett, 1995). Yet, think tanks always reason from their own, particular ideological base, potentially reconstructing how society views social phenomena. Tending to present themselves as “independent” (from government and business), think tanks purport to offer alternative views to understanding the position of specific agendas and policy priorities. These organisations, however, are more or less explicit about their ideological positions. In practice, think tanks can challenge existing government policies and their philosophical metrics, and may perform a critical role in advancing countervailing political arguments. Thus, in the UK, for example, there are alternative economic policies being advocated by think tanks which are critical of the prevailing austerity policy regime or “economic growth” at all costs positions (Vivid Economics, 2012). In effect, attention is turning to promoting a responsible form of capitalism – one that is not exclusively market economically deterministic and which takes into deliberate consideration wider social, community, locality and environmental considerations.

The publication of such new ideas, critiques and perspectives battle in the public arena for greater influence and primacy in determining public policy and spending priorities. The critical focus of the market-infused think tanks tends to be that of emphasising the efficiency of government, the associated processes of governance and transparency in

policy-making, together with the effectiveness of specific public policies, interventions and measures. Against the backcloth of the 2008/2009 global recession, the general mood of the voluminous think tank reports, pamphlets and blogs is one of pessimism and is critical of government intervention at large.

The extension of the business-oriented agenda to the operation of the statutory land use planning system in general and to its specific constituent elements, such as development management and development planning, proved significant (Lloyd & Peel, 2002). A common argument is that land use planning regulations and processes inhibit economic growth and investment – to the detriment of society at large (Morton & Ehrman, 2011). Significantly, such critiques of land use planning thinking and practice are based on a largely neoliberal market viewpoint – and reflect a frustration that planning is not more business and consumer sensitive. This has led to new ideas being promoted which go further than simple critiques of government intervention and the advocacy of market solutions. There is a turn to the dissemination of new models for planning and development.

This reorientation may be illustrated by the Policy Exchange think tank, for example. In the English context, where foundational changes have been put into place to change the land use planning system, Policy Exchange argues that a better attitude towards planning and development can turn the tide and improve the prospects for cities (Morton, 2011). Its central premise is that a “stunted” planning system, a product of a 1940s’ utopian vision of bureaucratic control has failed society for too long. It contends that the reforms effected since the millennium are too timid and are not likely to create the step change needed. It asserts that land use planning has failed in two ways: it has not enabled enough house building and what has been built is of mediocre quality. The problem is identified as the excessive nature of planning policy and regulations. The report calls for a full overhaul of the planning system whereby a “Presumption against Interference” by government should be at the heart of land use planning. It advocates that business should be free to build as it sees fit – unless 50% of those in the immediate vicinity oppose such development, or in the case of high-quality amenity land (e.g. National Parks or Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty). The proposed ideas for change represent a new phase in the rationale for, and operation of, land use planning in England. Furthermore, these ideas have the potential to effect a turning point in the role of land use planning in managing the use and development of land in an advanced market economy. Policy Exchange has explored and advocated a number of new models of land use planning – including brownfield liberalisation, urban extensions and self-build (Morton, 2012). This has had an influence on the turn to self-build to enhance the supply of housing.

### **The turn to self-build**

Building one’s own home is not a new phenomenon in advanced developed economies (Ærø, 2006). Barlow (1992) explored the importance of self-promoted housing in France in the 1970s and 1980s, stating that this form of self-development afforded some 40% of the annual house building at that time. The explicit turn to self-build is potentially a radical departure from conventional land use planning practice in England. It involves a proposal that would allow local people to buy their own plot of land and design their own self-built home. In part, this challenges the homogeneity of building promulgated by volume house builders. Policy Exchange asserts that “custom designed” homes would be more appealing to local communities. In effect, the think tank argues

that local people, not national or council rules, would control what new homes could look like.

The Callcutt Review of Housebuilding Delivery (2007) recognised the potential of the self-build sector in contributing to the overall supply of housing. In July 2011, NASBA, a joint Government–Industry working group to promote the sector, published a vision for self-build. In its Action Plan, NASBA (Self Build Government–Industry Working Group, 2011) asserted its intention to remove the key barriers to self-build housing. It advocated (i) making more land available for self-builders and enhancing procurement models; (ii) improving the availability of development finance for the sector; (iii) providing better information to the self-build industry; and (iv) removing any planning and regulatory barriers – what was termed “red tape”. The generic term “self-build” is not without its problems. Initially, NASBA (2012) defined self-build housing as housing built by individuals or groups of individuals for their own use. It typically involves commissioning the construction of a new house by a builder, contractor or a package company. In a number of cases, individuals may actually build the house themselves. There are various permutations to self-build.

The 2011 Housing Strategy for England (HM Government, 2011), for example, coined the term “custom build housing” to reflect the variety of ways in which individuals can have their home built for them. NASBA (2013) subsequently stated that the term self-build tends to describe homes which are largely self-organised or which are built as a DIY (Do it Yourself) project. The general option may be contrasted with the more conventional arrangement of purchasing a house from a volume house builder on housing estates. This sharpening of definition of the alternative modes of self-build shows a raised awareness of this approach to acquiring a home. There are a number of factors that serve to explain the growing visibility of self-build in the UK, and particularly in England. A Report (NASBA, 2012) in April 2012 updated progress in the four areas for action identified (Table 1).

Demonstrating the early momentum of this advocacy, a second progress report (NASBA, 2013) in August reported further Government and private sector support for self-build housing together with recorded efforts to reduce state controls (Table 2).

Capturing the *zeitgeist* in an opportune way, in November 2013 the Planning Minister Nick Boles, and one of the founders of the Policy Exchange think tank in 2002, called for public land to be made available for self-build, in particular for young people, to get a foot on the property ladder. He stated “We should think about saying, ‘If you

Table 1. Summary of progress towards self-build in England 2012.

Action area	Progress
Land and procurement	Improvement in information on public sector availability; public sector land disposals to include opportunity for self-build; Promotion with house builders and landowners of the sector
Lending and finance	Preparation of valuation guidance on self-build; revolving fund to help finance multi-plot self-build projects
Self-build industry	Promotion campaign for self-build; best practice information prepared; attention paid to the problems of “land scams”
Regulation and red tape	A start to reform and streamline planning regulations to facilitate self-build development, together with related issues, including building regulations, health and safety, VAT, warranty and utilities issues

Source: NASBA (2012).



Table 2. Summary of progress towards self-build in England 2013.

Action area	Progress
Land and procurement	A number of sites identified for self-build; growing council and builder activity promoting opportunities; publication of specialist guides on self-build
Lending and finance	Modest increase in lender activity; publication of Lloyds Banking Group Report; launch of a £30 m investment fund; £17 m community-led project support fund launched by the Westminster government
Self-build industry	Increased provision of information for the self-build sector; All-Party Parliamentary Group on self-build established
Regulation and red tape	Consultation on self-builder relief from the Community Infrastructure Levy; publication of Government proposals to make it easier to convert redundant farm buildings into homes

Source: NASBA (2013).

can't buy a home then you should be able to get a plot and to be able to build yourself a home if you want one – put yourself on the list for self-build” (cited in Wintour, 2013). Here, the experience from the Netherlands provides further insights into the self-build sector.

### Self-build: insights from the Netherlands

The Netherlands self-build programme has become a celebrated example of a proven way of providing innovative housing development, mirroring a parallel enthusiasm for its integrated planning and transport systems. In the late 1990s, however, Dutch policy-makers considered that it was appropriate to revive the long tradition of self-build in the Netherlands that had been lost during the twentieth century due to the explosive demand for new housing. New industrial building methods and the production of standard housing plans enabled the rapid construction realisation of many housing units at relatively low costs in compact densities. The large-scale housing estates developments were dominated by housing associations; and more recently by consortia of private developers. In particular, the latter development forms served to decrease the amount of land available for self-build, as private developer consortia were not eager to sell the land as large housing estate development was relatively more profitable. Whereas self-build in countries like Germany and Belgium has always been part of the dominant housing culture, it had almost disappeared in the Netherlands (RPB, 2007). In trying to limit the dominant practices of large house builders to develop housing estates created the circumstances in which self-build gained new attention.

The 2001 Dutch National Housing Report “Mensen, Wensen, Wonen” (People, Wishes, Living) (Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment, 2001) gave a deliberate political impetus for self-build. It stated that a third of Dutch housing production should be self-built by 2040. This was significant as at that time, the percentage of self-build was about 15% of the annual Dutch housing production. Some local governments stimulated self-build initiatives through the provision of infrastructure, whilst others allocated building land specifically for self-build purposes. This reflects the specific positive planning powers of Dutch local authorities with respect to their municipal land holdings and development initiatives. The direct development strategies of Dutch governments effectively enable municipalities to buy and sell land themselves as a means to achieve their stated planning goals. In practice, however, available

land tends to be in the hands of private developers. Furthermore, local authorities can zone land for affordable housing, thereby resulting in lower costs for potential self-builders. This may be contrasted with the land strategies of private developers. As Figures 1 and 2 indicate, the political target of an increase of self-build in the Netherlands has never been realised. At the national level, governmental policies are still in favour of self-build – because it is seen as a way to solve the current housing market problems. Since 2006, the national government goal of 30% (Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment, 2006) and at the local level, self-build is increasingly seen as an important way to develop housing.

A well-known example of self-build in the Netherlands is the large-scale self-build experiment in Almere. This town lies to the east of Amsterdam and is situated on reclaimed land. It grew rapidly since the 1980s and now incorporates a deliberate self-build zone (*Homeruskwartier*). The initiative has attracted considerable critical attention within the Netherlands and abroad (Hopkirk, 2011; Self Build Government-Industry Working Group, 2011). The strategic target is 1000 self-build homes to be constructed in a planned layout on a total of about 3400 units. The UK-based Town and Country Planning Association (2012), for example, has described Almere as affording a national demonstration site for the large-scale implementation of sustainable systems. Almere has become the focus of study visits for those seeking to learn how the authority has implemented this approach to sustainable urban growth, further evidence of deliberate attempts to foster learning (Peel & Lloyd, 2008). Reflecting its intellectual provenance, the Town and Country Planning Association (2012) asserts that Almere demonstrates the adoption of garden city self-build principles and promotes as an exemplar of good practice.

In Almere, a Labour politician, Adri Duivesteijn, was responsible for popularising the experiment. In an interview with one of the authors in 2007, he explained that he wanted to challenge traditional housing and turn housing into a more demand-driven and small-scale form of home. After he became aldermen of Almere – as one of the advocates of the increased importance for self-build in the late 1990s – he cancelled the existing plans for large housing estates and implemented self-build at a large scale in

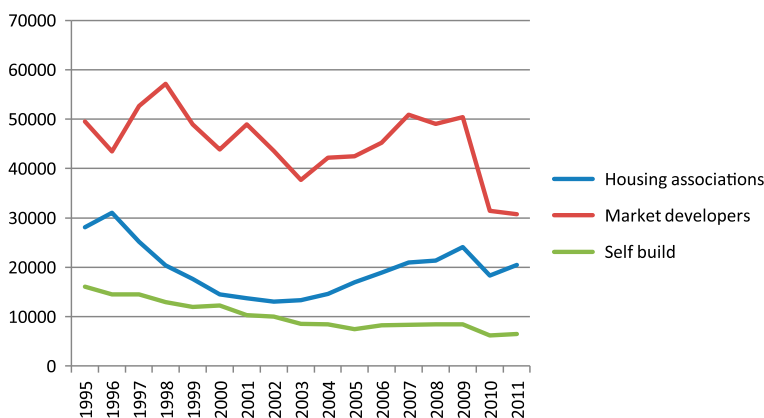


Figure 1. Numbers of self-build residential units in the Netherlands 1995–2011. Source: (CBS, 2013).

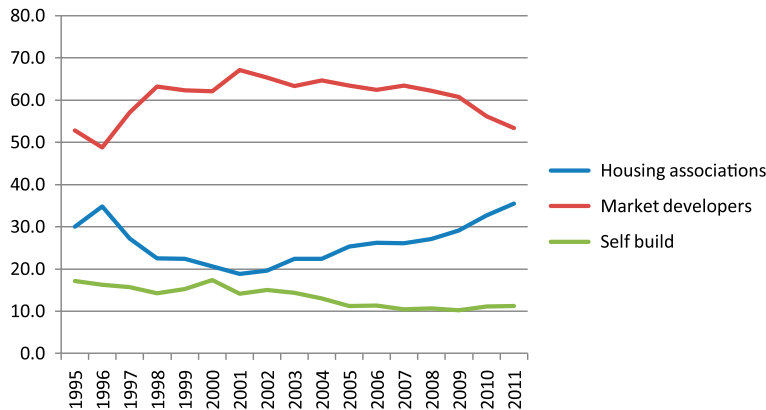


Figure 2. Percentage of self-build residential units in the Netherlands 1995–2011. Source: (CBS, 2013).

the Homerus quarter. Self-build then sits at the core of the overall development strategy for Almere.

In many cases, self-build is primarily an opportunity for higher income individuals to express their free choice. Recently, however, some local authority experiments have started to provide plots for low-income households in the self build context. In Almere, for example, a portion of the municipal masterplan has been deliberately reserved for low-income households. To keep the building costs low, these plots are small, and people have thus built smaller houses. Nevertheless, the self-build option has allowed individuals to live independently and to gain access to the housing market. From this perspective, the low-cost self-build option is seen as a success.

In self-build areas in the Netherlands, planning remains central to securing the public interest. A masterplan is prepared by the municipality and the infrastructure is specified beforehand on a very detailed level. Buyers of a plot know the location of shops, parks and even road humps in advance. All plots are serviced. Yet, the landscaping and final road provision will only be undertaken after the completion of all the individual homes. This implies that many “settlers” will be living – literally – on a building site – perhaps for a couple of years or more. A consequence is that their residential amenity – and associated property values – may be adversely affected by the ongoing building activities of their neighbours.

The Netherlands experience suggests that one of the issues that is often overlooked is that of securing finance for self-build. Banks need security and will only provide a mortgage if they are certain about property value. That value is difficult to predict in self-build. At the time of writing, however, only one Dutch bank is willing to provide mortgages, and with even stricter regulations than on “normal build homes”. In recent years, regulation has become relatively stricter when compared to conventional house purchasing arrangements. This will likely affect younger groups with limited equity. For many people that pursue self-build, it is the financial restrictions that have served as the deterrent to self-build owner occupation.

The Dutch experiences also suggest that self-build can create a genuine diversity of building styles and materials. Although some local authorities decided to grant people complete freedom of aesthetics, in many cities, design is strictly controlled and each

self-build home is required to conform to a design code. This type of self-build tends typically to be relatively more expensive.

With respect to the “quality dimension” of self-build in the Netherlands, there are mixed results but also mixed assessments of the quality. In Almere, for example, building guidelines were kept to a minimum, but articulated within a comprehensive master-plan with the zoning of districts. Some people reason that an absence of overall urban coherence is beneficial, whilst others critique the “wild west” character of such areas and consider it too instrumental. Kit houses, in particular, attract the most critical commentary, but this form of self-build is likely to be more affordable than a unique build.

The question of individual design and diversity or consistency and conformity is contested. Many architects argue that the quality of the built environment deteriorates if cities decide to “only check the building construction” and abandon all aesthetic and size requirements. They criticise the design skills of laymen in sometimes a very denigrating way. In Hopkirk (2011), it has been argued, for example, that “as many of the residents move here from elsewhere in Almere, they may have been exposed to a limited architectural stylebook”, which also gives an idea how architects think about Almere in general. On the other hand, one can argue that control over the living and residential environment is more important for liveable communities than aesthetics. Recently, Koole and Kämena (2014) show that for many of the self-builders in Homerus Quarter, living was the driving factor not beauty. This has resulted in a mix of modern, classic and functional building styles.

How the self-build neighbourhoods develop over the next decades remains to be seen. Social cohesion is often cited as a beneficial feature of self-build communities, effectively translating self-build into community building. Questions must be raised, however, as to whether this sense of community erodes over time as individuals and families change, just like in any neighbourhood. There is evidence of a wide variation in quality – not only of the self-build homes, but also of self-build neighbourhoods. The resilience of these self-build communities is yet unknown, and varies between the perspective of the individual and the community.

The Netherlands’ experience with self-build thus generates some interesting tensions. The lack of design control and overall project management can potentially inhibit investment by new people as they want more certainty about the house next door, as its quality and design might affect the value of their own home. Yet, from the individual perspective of a self-styled architect of their own home, potential self-builders have as much freedom to build whatever they like and to use the materials they choose – or can afford. As a consequence, however, the more strict regulation of mortgage provision and the more risk-averse behaviour of home builders have slowed the turn to self-build in the Netherlands.

Finally, it is important to ask to what extent self-build is used to meet broader housing targets in the Netherlands. As in the UK, Dutch house building is at a relatively low level, despite the political advocacy with self-build targets in the late 1990s. As discussed above, the 2001 goal of 30% self-build by 2040 had already been realised in 2006. Figure 1 shows the absolute number of residential units provided by developers, housing associations and self-build. Figure 2 presents the relative figures. Both figures show that the desired increase in self-build has never occurred; the figures show an absolute and relative decline. More recently, it has often been argued that self-build is performing better in the recession than volume house builders. Self-build is now also in the Netherlands seen as a new way to meet national housing targets, just like in the UK. Yet the evidence is conflicting.

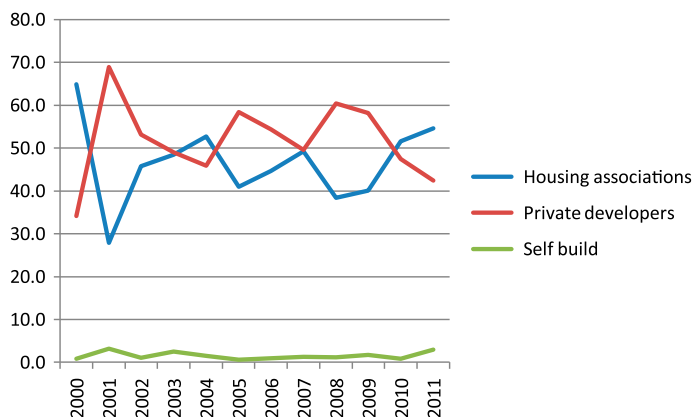


Figure 3. Percentage of self-build in Amsterdam 2000–2011.  
Source: (CBS, 2013).

Although the evidence suggests that self-build has performed better in the recession than private developers, the housing associations did best overall (although this has recently changed due to new regulation). In absolute and relative terms, the share of self-build has decreased. This happened slightly later than in the other house building sectors, and may be considered a consequence of the lengthier self-build construction processes. Many houses that were completed in 2009 and 2010, for example, resulted from construction processes that were started before the global recession began.

In the City of Amsterdam, some relatively successful self-build projects have started since 2010. Notwithstanding this specific recovery in self-build, Figure 3 shows that only a very limited share of Amsterdam's housing targets are met by self-build. Based on this level of self-build activity, its limited provision will not likely solve the general housing shortage, stimulate the development sector out of the economic recession or necessarily improve housing quality.

### Social constructions in motion

This paper commenced with the observation that self-build housing in the UK, and particularly England, is increasingly advocated as a new source of housing supply. This reflects a number of ideological influences, largely driven by neoliberal ideas concerning state, market and civil relations. It asserted that think tanks increasingly play an influential role in socially reconstructing the case for self-build housing. Examples from elsewhere have gained attention, based on efforts to adopt international practice. Almere in the Netherlands, for example, is held as an exemplar to be imitated, although the example shows it is a time-consuming process and it takes a long time before community well-being and quality is realised. Moreover, Dutch policy targets to increase self-build have failed and have already been questioned. In the Netherlands, 90% of the homes delivered are still ready-to-live-in, unlike many other countries except the UK. There seem to be many factors that prevent people adopting self-build as their way to develop homes, in particular because of time-consumption and the high-risk process, while concurrently mortgage provision is increasing difficult.

In terms of the social construction of self-build in England and Scotland, scientific evidence has been assembled regarding the need to increase housing supply and reflects

a perception that planning regulations inhibit the efficiency of the housing sector. Evidence has also been gathered from a variety of sources that self-build – hitherto a relatively minor component of housing in the UK – has the potential to contribute to addressing the housing agenda. The evidence has come from think tanks, government and government–industry bodies and an array of academic studies.

As the momentum for self-build has strengthened, an institutional sponsor has emerged in the form of a Government–Industry body, NASBA. This body serves as to champion the self-build sector in the housing market. Importantly, NASBA has also attempted to influence government policy priorities with respect to finance, procurement and information provision. NASBA implicitly echoes the neoliberal position and is anti-thetical to land use planning regulations and building standards – what it caricatures as red tape.

There is an interesting context to this institutional sponsorship in the form of considerable media attention and popularisers, including television celebrities, which sustains a self-build momentum. This focus resonates with the considerable international contemporary interest in lifestyle choices (Ærø 2006; Thomas, 2011), which complement traditional theories of housing choices. A central argument in the pro-self-build lobby turns on the economic argument relating to house building costs. This is presented as an incentive to explore the alternative housing supply and supply chain logic orchestrated by the predominance of large speculative and volume house builders in the UK (Barlow et al., 2003).

## Conclusions

Experiences in self-promoted housing solutions and approaches to home building differ internationally (Barlow, 1992; Barlow et al., 2003), highlighting issues for residential and lifestyle choice (Ærø, 2006). In 2001, the Dutch National Housing Report, “Mensen, Wensen, Wonen” (People, Wishes, Living), for example, gave a political impetus for self-build. Different opportunities for pursuing custom-built home opportunities raise questions around consumer demand and need, land availability, infrastructure provision and maintenance, lending and finance, procurement and quality, neighbourhood design and sense of place, scope for local discretion and relationships between consumers, builders, landowners and the state – particularly as articulated through the land use planning system.

The paper shows that self-build is not a new phenomenon. The widening of definitions of self-build suggest that this is a maturing form of housing self-development. International comparative experience, however, shows the complex array of social, finance, design, supply chain, property rights and values, and infrastructure issues associated with what may appear to be self-explanatory as a potential source of housing supply. Morton (2013) helpfully points to the underuse of self-build in the UK, further reinforcing its perceived attractiveness to individuals, government and the supply industry. Lying at the core of the self-build debate in the UK, however, is an intellectual tension. On the one hand, the social construction of self-build is permeated by neoliberal thinking and a turn to libertarian values. This is most evident in the anti-planning rhetoric deployed by the think tanks and NASBA. The latter’s concern with removing red tape is one of its key priorities. On the other hand, however, this paper has shown – drawing on the exemplar of the Netherlands – the importance of masterplanning, design guidance and building regulations in mediating the idiosyncratic nature of self-build. In tandem, the Netherlands’ experience highlights the importance of infrastructure

provision in self-build neighbourhoods and here, municipal authorities play a central role. In terms of both planning and infrastructure, this experience stands in marked contrast to prevailing arrangements and attitudes in the UK.

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